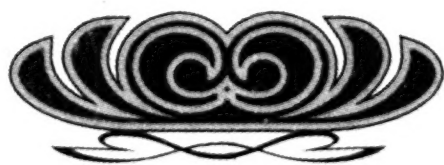


GEMS

OF BUDDHIST
WISDOM





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PUBLISHERS' NOTE

he first edition of this book was published in 1983 to commemorate the 21st Anniversary of the founding of the Buddhist Missionary Society. The Society set about collecting and publishing various articles concerning different aspects of Buddhism written in a simple and concise manner. Its chief contributor is its religious advisor, Ven. Dr. K. Sri Dhammananda Nayaka Maha Thera, *J.S.M (Chief High Priest of Malaysia & Singapore.)*. Other prominent Buddhist scholars throughout the world were also most generous with their contributions.

Thanks to Ven. Dr. K. Sri Dhammananda, his devoted assistants and the growing interest in Buddhism, the Society's publications spread throughout the country and across the globe. We have been receiving many letters from all over the world in appreciation of these booklets and also requesting more copies. We have realized that these booklets have, in many instances, served as the keys which have opened the minds of a large number of people to the understanding of Buddhism. The cost of printing these booklets was borne by the many generous donors who gave freely in the true

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Buddhist tradition of charity and unselfishness. The booklets have even been translated and often more than a hundred thousand copies of each booklet have been reprinted and distributed throughout the world.

It has now been decided to present these articles to an even wider readership in a more durable text so that these gems of Buddhist wisdom may be better preserved for future generations. Many of the articles have been modified and re-edited wherever possible to avoid unnecessary repetition, linguistic and orthographical errors.

This book is not intended to be read from cover to cover at one sitting. It is hoped that the reader will go through each article mindfully, but at leisure, ponder the arguments presented by each writer before proceeding to another article. The articles are also not arranged in any strict logical sequence so that they may be read in any order and not necessarily as they are presented here.

The writers represented in this book are well-known authors of scholarly treatises on Buddhism who are highly respected in academic institutions all over the world. Yet, their great humility is reflected in their ability to write on the most serious aspects of our religion in a simple and straightforward manner, devoid of any pretentious, archaic or pompous literary style. Short articles, such as those printed in this book put the sublime Teachings of the Buddha within the reach of everyone. Many of them display a charming sense of humour and wit coupled with a very down-to-earth

approach to the complex problems of humanity.

Through the quotations used by the writers, the lay reader can also share the thoughts of great writers, both Western and Asian – like Bertrand Russell and Radhakrishnan. It is hoped that these will encourage the readers to go to the original texts to partake of the great wisdom of mankind.

As one reads these articles, one may become aware of a number of repetitions, not only of the ideas presented but also of quotations from the sacred texts. It is hoped that the kind reader will understand why this is so. The writers are not dwelling on any specific theme. In fact, many of them are widely separated in time and space. For example, at least one of these articles is about thirty-five years old, while the others have been written more recently in Malaysia, Sri Lanka and Europe.

However, one may begin to see a common aim arising out of these different writings – namely to clarify a number of misconceptions regarding Buddhism and also to stress the uniqueness of the Buddha's Teachings. One may, for example, read repeatedly about the Kalama Sutra which proves that the Buddha alone, amongst all the religious teachers of the world, declared that no one must accept His Teachings without first evaluating them intelligently. It is often referred to as the Magna Carta of Buddhism.

Constant reference is also made to the Four Noble Truths, the Noble Eightfold Path, and the three

characteristics (*Anicca, Dukkha, Anatta*). And this is as it should be, considering that these three are probably the most brilliant crystallisations of a whole body of philosophical thought to be found in any religion. No discussion of the Buddhist way of life can be made without a reference to these, the essence of the Buddha's Teachings.

Buddhists never tire of proclaiming how they alone have absolutely no history of bloodshed in the propagation of their religion. They credit the Buddha with having forbidden violence of any kind and quote various passages from the Dhammapada for this purpose. And they talk at length about the Emperor Asoka to prove that the Dhamma can be practised as a national way of life. They also refer to the Sigalovada Sutra to highlight the Buddha's advice to those who are not yet ready to renounce the world.

A close reading of these articles will surely prove to anyone that Buddhism can stand up to vigorous scientific investigation and challenges, while at the same time going beyond science to give man a purpose in life and to help him understand the nature of his existence.

It may be necessary to explain here that when Pali or Sanskrit words are used, the writers choose to spell them differently (e.g. *Gotama – Gautama; Sutta – Sutra; Dhamma – Dharma; Nibbana – Nirvana; Karma – Kamma; Bodhisatta – Bodhisatva; Tipitaka – Tripitaka* etc.), but these should in no way interfere with the understanding of what is being said because English translations are

generally provided. Some writers prefer to use capitals for the pronouns referring to the Buddha, and some do not. Again, some writers refer to "the Buddha", others simply call him Buddha.

We humbly offer you these gems of Buddhist Wisdom in the hope that even if you do not share our views, you will at least appreciate the Teachings of the Buddha and the practice of Buddhism without bias and without discrimination.

The Buddhist Missionary Society is deeply grateful to all the learned scholars and writers for their contributions of their valuable articles, and also to Messrs Quah Swee Kheng, Eddy Yu, Mrs Goh Kim Mong, Alison Cheok, Daphne Chua, James Moran, Linda Moran, Ken Lee, Amelia Low (Hong Kong) and Vijaya Samarawickrama for their selfless service in the compilation of this book and special thanks also to Chong Hong Choo for the design of the book cover.

Tan Teik Beng
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